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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001815

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MOPS CG

SUBJECT: PRESIDENCY COUNSELOR ON EAST SITUATION

Classified By: Ambassador Roger Meece. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶11. (C) I met one-on-one with Presidency Ambassador at Large Antoine Ghonda on Friday October 28 to review events subsequent to the recent Tripartite Plus meeting in Kampala. Regarding the situation in the east, Ghonda expressed some dismay about the apparent lack of USG understanding over GDRC sensitivities regarding proposed joint operations with the Ugandan and Rwanda armies.

¶12. (C) I told Ghonda I would speak frankly as a friend. The GDRC de facto position is not tenable. Following years of war and occupation, I could understand the sensitivity of Transition government agreement to Ugandan or Rwandan forces on DRC territory. Ghonda interjected that is especially the case in the months running up to elections, given strong popular emotions on this subject. I added, however, that up to now the GDRC was not doing anything else. Hence, relative to any military pressure, the position seemed to be, "we don't accept this idea, but we are not doing anything else ourselves." I also noted that whatever hopes may be attached to restarting the Rome process, or Col. Amani's moves to promote peaceful voluntary and peaceful repatriation to Rwanda, I personally had no doubt that military pressure is needed to achieve results with the FDLR, and likely other "negative forces" as well. Ghonda agreed, and said he better understood the concerns being expressed.

¶13. (C) Providing further back-up to my statements, I showed Ghonda a copy of the "annotated" agenda we had used for the previous day's meeting of the Mixed Commission on Security, chaired by Vice President Ruberwa. The "annotated" agenda included specific concerns and items for action. I told Ghonda the meeting had lasted over three hours. We had discussed in considerable detail numerous problems, and I pointed out to Ghonda items on the agenda regarding the lack of timely deployments of integrated and trained brigades to operational areas in North and South Kivu, the severe problems of pay, food, and other support to deployed FARDC units, and current blockages getting troops to integration centers to start the next phase of integrated brigade training. Ghonda, who has not previously pursued details of the internal security portfolio ceding that to Special Security Counselor Samba Kaputo's office, appeared surprised by the extent and nature of some of the detailed problems. He asked to make a copy of the document, which he did, and said that it and our discussion would be helpful in his discussions with President Kabila.

¶14. (C) I also asked Ghonda about his candid assessment of the likelihood of Angolan intervention in eastern DRC. Ghonda had traveled to Luanda just before the Tripartite meeting, and my understanding was that a desired Angolan role in eastern Congo was part of his agenda. He affirmed it was, but admitted that it is not clear the Angolans are ready to commit. He said at minimum it appears the Angolans want another African country involved, and the Congolese have identified South Africa as the best prospect. Ghonda confidentially reported that the Congolese earlier had

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misgivings about such a South African role in eastern DRC, but were now ready to accept it. I asked if South Africa was ready and able to take on such a mission, given for example the potential problem of SADF troop availability given current deployments and commitments. Ghonda said he was not sure.

¶15. (C) I asked Ghonda if the perceived Angolan desire for a partner was in fact in terms of military capability, or basically political cover. If the former, there are only a relative handful of African armies able to do much. If the underlying issue is political, however, the solution is easier. The long-discussed Benin battalion, for example, could conceivably be dedicated to this mission vice its proposed addition to MONUC (Note: The Belgian government has reportedly long been preparing the Benin battalion for a MONUC deployment. End note). Alternatively, a battalion or two might be found from other countries who might not bring a major military capability to the table, but could provide an African Union or at least broader African cover to an Angolan mission. Much as the 2003 Operation Artemis in Ituri District was billed as a European Union operation but was really French-led, something similar might be done in eastern Congo - if the basic problem impeding Angolan willingness is

political. Ghonda took some notes and indicated the idea was worth pursuing.

¶6. (SBU) Separately there are press reports and other information starting October 31 of a FARDC-led operation, coordinated with (and supported by) MONUC, in North Kivu targeting "negative forces" around Virunga Park. The operation reportedly involves elements of the newly-deployed Fifth Integrated Brigade, the first integrated FARDC unit deployed to either North or South Kivu. We will be providing septel reporting of that development.

¶7. (C) Comment: My discussion with Ghonda was open and frank, and I sought to reinforce the message that the GDRC must take meaningful action itself relative to military operations in the east, as well as in terms of support for its troops. Ghonda seemed to take the message on board, but decisions in the Transition Government are never easy, and very rarely rapidly implemented. Nonetheless, the report of the 5th Integrated operation is encouraging. I have no basis for assessing potential Angolan willingness to deploy troops for operations against the FDLR or other forces in eastern Congo and defer to Embassy Luanda. Clearly, however, the Congolese are hopeful of getting help from the Angolans. If in fact some relatively minor additional African country contribution could provide sufficient political cover to tip the balance on an Angolan decision, that seems a lot easier to achieve than a second major military component of a prospective African force. We will continue to follow-up on the report of the North Kivu operation, and indeed continue to press for further integrated brigade deployments, support, and FARDC operations in both South and North Kivu as well. End comment.

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